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IO FOR SINGH AND REES

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TAGS: [KUNR](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [UNHRC](#)
SUBJECT: DAS SINGH AND AMBASSADOR REES' GENEVA TALKS -
HUMANITARIAN MEETINGS

REF: GENEVA 01992

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, Mark Storella. Reason 1.4 (b)(d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: IO Deputy Assistant Secretary Singh and Special Representative for Social Issues Rees used a human rights-focused August 6-8 visit to Geneva to also address a range of humanitarian, refugee, and health issues, as well as UN reform. DAS Singh also underscored the importance the USG attaches to U.S. employment in UN organizations. (Reftel reports on discussions of human rights during the visit.) End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) DAS Manisha Singh and Special Representative for Social Issues Grover Joseph Rees held a series of discussions on humanitarian, refugee and health issues as well as U.S. employment in UN organizations and UN reform during their August 6-8 Geneva visit. They met with Director of the Geneva Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Kasidis Rochanakorn and his senior staff; with Craig Johnstone, Deputy at the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and his staff; with the Executive Director and others in the World Health Organization (WHO); and with Debbie Wynes, Chair of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU).

Humanitarian Affairs

¶3. (C) Rochanakorn, who heads the Geneva OCHA, and his senior staff outlined OCHA priorities. He said Undersecretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, Sir John Holmes, was focused on consolidating the UN humanitarian reform process, maintaining a strong advocacy and policy role for OCHA and developing an OCHA structure that could meet the expectations that humanitarian reform had placed on it. He expressed concern about the erosion of humanitarian space, as evidenced in Lebanon, &where we were stuck in hotels.8 This would require reinforcement of the UN's ability to work closely with various partners, including the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement.

¶4. (C) Rochanakorn said that OCHA did not have enough trained personnel to deal with civilian military affairs in a major, tsunami-like humanitarian crisis. However, Gerhard

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Putman-Cramer, head of the OCHA Emergency Services Branch, averred that OCHA did not need simply to increase overall training) that might even be scaled back) but should place more focus on better targeted civilian-military training. Rochanakorn said the humanitarian community accepted the special role of the military, but that issues were more sensitive in complex humanitarian crises involving

conflict situations, where military units would focus on force protection while humanitarians would focus on integrating with the local population. DAS Singh also asked about the Global Humanitarian Platform, and Rochanakorn responded that the reform effort was seen as too UN-centric and that the platform was a necessary step to rebuild confidence with UN partners.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees

15. (U) DAS Singh and Ambassador Rees also met with Johnstone, the Deputy at the UNHCR. Johnstone (AmCit) noted UNHCR's overall responsibilities, including its primary role to protect refugees and ensure that governments uphold and respect relevant legal instruments. He added that stateless persons and internally displaced persons (IDPs) were also populations of concern to UNHCR and were covered within UNHCR's crosscutting protection issues. Johnstone noted that UNHCR worked closely with the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), particularly on the rights of refugees and IDPs. He noted that UNHCR had been working with the Jordanian government to fulfill displaced Iraqi children's rights to education in Jordan and that the Syrian government was being very responsive by ensuring the protection of displaced Iraqis in Syria. He described the human rights situation in Iraq as seriously lacking due to the Iraqi government's inability to respond adequately to human rights abuses. Johnstone hoped the USG would resettle the UNHCR-referred Iraqi refugees, recognizing the delays related to security issues.

16. (U) Emphasizing the importance of protection, Ambassador Rees noted that precautions against sexual exploitation of refugees were of concern to the USG. He asked about UNHCR mechanisms to prevent such exploitation, adding that perpetrators could also be NGO workers, peacekeepers, and

refugees themselves. Both Johnstone and Merida Morales-O'Donnell, Director of the Division of Human Resources Management, emphasized that UNHCR was very cognizant about responding to such misconduct and that the organization had a zero tolerance policy, including summary dismissals. Morales-O'Donnell explained that all UNHCR staffers were required to sign an agreement to uphold the Code of Conduct that outlines the policy against exploitative and non-consensual relationships with beneficiaries and requiring disclosure to superiors of relationships that the UN employee regarded as consensual and non-exploitative. She added that UNHCR partners were also obligated to sign the agreement.

U.S. Employment in UN Agencies

17. (U) DAS Singh underscored to Johnstone that employment of U.S. citizens in UN organizations continued to be highly important for the USG. Asked for his thoughts on how to increase the number of Americans at UNHCR and retain them, Johnstone replied that it was currently difficult for UNHCR to hire new staff due to a hiring freeze. He added that the organization was also cutting back staff positions to make UNHCR leaner and more efficient under the current reform efforts.

World Health Organization and Maternal Mortality

18. (U) In meetings with the Executive Director of the WHO Director General's Office and with WHO officials working on family health and maternal mortality issues, Ambassador Rees explained his portfolio as Special Representative for Social Issues, its link with President Bush's Human Dignity Agenda, and USG interest in WHO maternal mortality programs. Dr. Bill Kean noted that improving maternal mortality centered on effectively managing pregnancy with pre-natal visits by qualified health workers as well as on managing labor. In Kean's view, the world should be ashamed that maternal

mortality had not been reduced.

¶9. (U) Daisy Mafabelu, Assistant Director General for Family and Community Health, and Dr. Quazi Monirul Islam, head of the WHO's Making Pregnancy Safer program, described the WHO's work on maternal mortality. Ambassador Rees emphasized USG interest in seeing the WHO be more programmatic on maternal health issues rather than merely holding conferences and advising governments. Islam lamented that improvements towards Millennium Development Goals on women and children, while real, had not made a dent in the problem. WHO was still working to increase the number of skilled birth attendants and move small communities away from overwhelming dependency on unskilled traditional birth attendants. Islam also highlighted the close worldwide link between maternal mortality and the survival of the child, particularly female children. The WHO had instituted "essential newborn care training", in conjunction with UNICEF and UNFPA, to address some of these issues. Commenting that USAID funding for maternal health had decreased in recent years because money was diverted to fight HIV/AIDS and malaria, Islam hoped that USG funding would increase again to reflect the importance of maternal health issues.

UN Reform -----

¶10. (U) DAS Singh met with Debbie Wynes, Chair of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), to discuss U.S. reform goals for the UN. Wynes emphasized the importance of the new initiative to implement oversight committees at the UN and at various agencies. Where oversight committees existed (in World Meteorological Organization) WMO - and World International Property Organization - WIPO), their effectiveness was limited by lack of expertise among committee members. This also affected the JIU structure and effectiveness. Wynes urged the U.S. to encourage senior representatives from member states - both Western and G-77 - to nominate only top-level people to the oversight committees.

¶11. (U) DAS Singh asked for examples of &success stories that would illustrate achievements by the UN in the area of reform. Wynes did not cite any specific examples and noted that many oversight mechanisms were relatively new. She indicated that while it might appear redundant, an oversight structure consisting of internal audit, external audit and oversight board was a standard practice in the private sector. She further stated that UN members needed to get the structure right, with adequate funding and qualified staff.

Wynes also noted that leadership was very important, citing the WMO and WIPO as contrasting examples of the role of the director general.
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